

SISTER'S GRAVE

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GRAVE SITES

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Indiana Grave Sites

Sarah Lincoln Grigsby
Grave

Excerpts from newspapers and other sources

From the files of the
Lincoln Financial Foundation Collection

Hoosiers Honor Sarah Lincoln; Monument Marks Her Grave

GRIGSBY DESCENDANTS DESCRIBE EMANCIPATOR'S BIRTH; ALSO SISTER'S COURTSHIP, MARRIAGE AND SHORT LIFE.

By ISAPHINE RICHEY.

IT WAS a beautiful day last spring when I set off on my journey to southern Indiana to visit the Lincoln country and talk with the descendants of the neighbors and friends of the Lincolns, some of them only a generation removed. I had gone in search of a story of the living boy, Lincoln, hoping to capture and release him from the legendary lore that has gathered about him. But I brought away with me the story of his sister Sarah. Sarah, who spent most of her young life among us, and who lies on Hoosier soil—forever ours. Abraham Lincoln belongs to the world and the nation has built him a tomb; Sarah belongs to Indiana and we have given her a monument. Tomorrow the nation will herald the birthday of her brother. Yesterday, her birthday, we remembered her whom he left with us because she was dear to him.

Gentryville, my stopping place, is in Hoosier parlance, "a stringtown on the pike," a village through which the highway runs. There, where the houses begin to straggle out into the country again, I found the humble home of Sarah Lincoln Grigsby's great nephew, Mr. Eli Grigsby. I sat through the sunny afternoon and listened to the stories of the Lincolns he had heard from his grandfather. He and his wife spoke of "Sally" (as she was called in the family) as intimately as we speak of the older generation in our own families, and suddenly "Sally" stepped out from the pages of a book and became a real and living girl to me.

"The family," said Mrs. Grigsby, "felt awful bad about the way she had to go." "Did they?" I returned. "How did the family feel about Aaron's marrying Sarah?" I asked. I wanted to know for it is a well-known fact that the Grigsbys owned a great deal of land (and orchards for distilling purposes, according to Mr. Grigsby) at the time of Sarah's marriage to Aaron, while the Lincolns were humble folk. "Well," she answered hesitantly, "Sally was hired help and you know how you'd feel about that." And then countering quickly. "But Sally was a fine woman and the family thought a great deal of her." "I am quite sure of that," I assured her.

Matter for Record.

"You knew, didn't you, that she was buried with her baby in her arms?" she questioned. "No, indeed, I didn't know that," I told her, "and I am very much interested in it for so far as I have read, that fact has never been told. Are you sure of it?" "Oh, yes, I am sure of it," she assured me, "we have always heard it that way." To which Mr. Grigsby added the information that he had heard it from his grandfather and Uncle "Nattie" many, many times and settled it conclusively by saying "and they were there." Which, of course,

they were. Bringing out a picture of the Grigsby spring Mr. Grigsby told me a little shamefacedly that it was there Aaron and Sally did their courting. "And Sally took her washing there every week, too, as they did in those days," added Mrs. Grigsby.

Out at the Lincoln farm, a mile from Gentryville, I wandered over the hills and valleys that had been so intimate a part of the Lincolns lives for 14 years. Following a path through the woods upon a little knoll I found a country church yard surrounded by tall forest trees. Over and through the fence that inclosed it, thick scrub and crowding bushes seemed threatening to overthrow the barrier and cover

the place with their wild profusion of green. Stepping high over the weeds of yesteryear and stumbling over vines and uneven ground I made my way to the grave of Abraham Lincoln's sister, the close companion of his youth, whose untimely death had been a great grief to him.

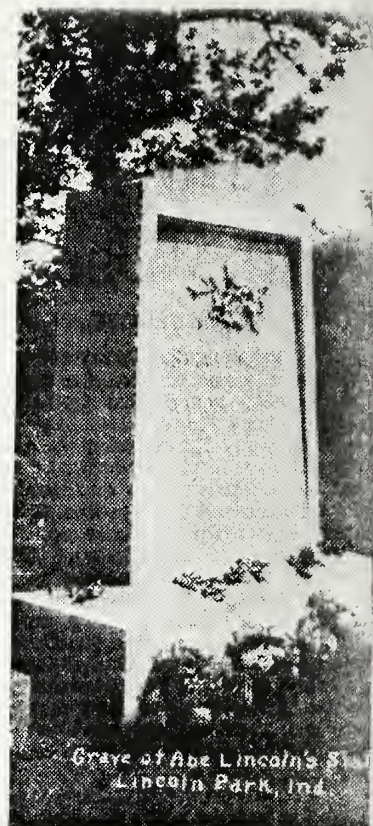
She lies in Old Pigeon's churchyard, distant about a mile from her mother's resting place. But to return to the story of Sarah, the living.

IN OLD KENTUCKE, in a little log cabin in the woods, a young mother lay with her newborn babe. Through the window shone the pale light of an early spring morning, throwing shadows on the dirt floor, and casting its cold gleam on the face of the woman lying within. Tired from her night of pain she lay with her eyes closed, but a tender look about her mouth belied the thought that she was asleep. Rather, would one have said she was lying quiescent, waiting for the news to be carried that she had borne her first son. Waiting for friends to come so that this inner smile might break forth and light up her face, and the room, and the hearts of those who had gathered to rejoice with her.

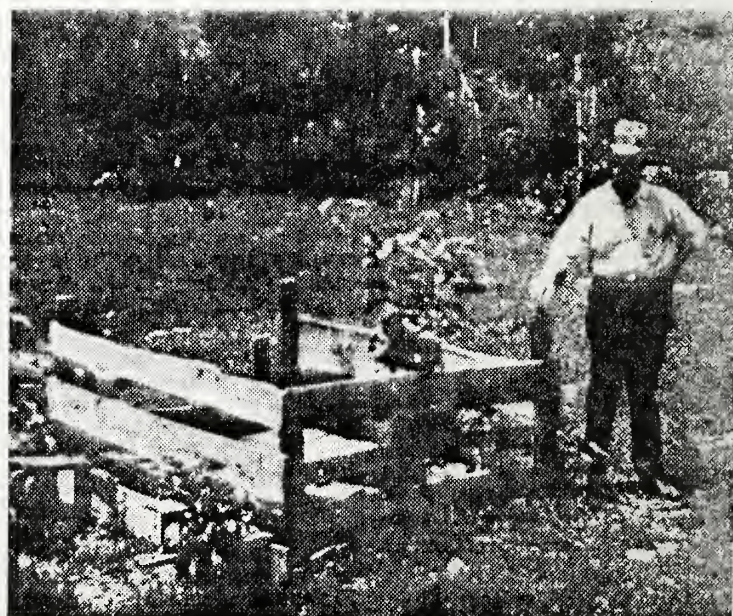
Over the pole bed on which she lay, a thoughtful hand had thrown a huge bear skin for added warmth, and seated in its shaggy depths was a little girl of 2, fully dressed, looking with unblinking solemnity at her mother and this thing of wonder that had somehow come in the night. Nothing dis-

turbed the stillness except the crackling of the great fire in the chimney place, as it leaped and sparkled its way to the frosty air above, and the thud of the logs as they broke apart and settled to their work. When suddenly the heavy door of split logs was thrust open and into the room burst a boy of 10. "Nancy," he breathlessly called, "Uncle Tom says as how you've got a baby boy, kin I tech him fur good luck? I've run the hull two miles from our house to see my new cousin." And then Nancy's laugh broke forth, and the little girl with the owl-like eyes pointed her tiny finger at the baby lying in the bed. The boy, Dennis, catching her up lifted her high above his head and said with a shake, "I know what you're trying to say, little Sairy, you're a tryin to tell me about the new baby ain't you? But you alluz wuz a say-nothin little gal."

Thus has the birth of Abraham Lincoln been described for us by Dennis Hanks, second cousin of



Monument at grave of Sarah Lincoln Grigsby.



Eli L. Grigsby, great-nephew of Sarah Lincoln Grigsby, standing at Grigsby spring, where Aaron met and courted Sally.

Abraham, wherein we have our first glimpse of quiet little Sarah. Skimming quickly over the years spent in Kentucky we come to the time when the family of four moved to the "Indian country up North" where Sarah became the mother of the family for a time. It was fall, the time of the year when the milk-sick attacked the settlers, and Nancy and the foster parents of herself and Dennis Hanks, Thomas and Betsy Sparrow, who had followed Nancy to her new home, had been the victims of it. Dennis had been taken into the Lincoln home after his bereavement.

"Oh Lord, O Lord," he tells us when he was a man of 90, "I'll never fergit the mizry in that little green-log cabin in the woods when Nancy left them. Abe tried to interest little Sairy in 'Iarnin' to read, but she never took to it. She wuz the only woman in the cabin that year, an' no neighbors fur miles. She'd git so lonesome, missin' her mother, she'd set by

the fire an' cry. Me 'n' Abe got 'er a baby coon an' a turtle, an' tried to git a fawn but we couldn't ketch any." Sarah was the cook and housekeeper, no inconsiderable task for a girl of 11. Those were dark days for the only woman in the cabin and it must have been a heartwarming time when her stepmother came with her own two daughters, Elizabeth the age of Sarah, and Matilda, four years younger, to be companions to her, and again to feel the glow that a mother can bring to a home. It is little wonder that in the words of Dennis "she chirked right up."

Sarah Goes to Work.

When Sarah, a plump girl with dark brown hair and grey eyes, and a rollicking sense of humor like her brother's, was 19, in company with Abe she went to work at the home of Josiah Crawford, a neighbor.

Near the home of Mr. Crawford lived Reuben Grigsby, with a large family of children, the

oldest of whom was Aaron. In those days the Grigsbys were considered wealthy and belonged to the upper 10 class, because they lived in a two-story hewed-log house; and even in these days I have heard from the neighbors that they are "high-headed." Proximity must have gotten in its full work for one day Mrs. Crawford's little boy Samuel, came running in with the news that Aaron Grigsby was sparking Sally Lincoln and that he had seen him kiss her. His mother admonished the boy and told him he must stop watching Sally or he wouldn't get to the wedding. Whether he "got" to the wedding or not, there was a wedding in August of that year and Cinderella left her crowded cabin home to live on her own farm near the wealthy Reuben.

Sarah Passes Away.

For two short years life flowed by in untroubled serenity and then Sarah was brought to childbed. Doctors lived far away from

these sparsely settled communities and their coming involved no little trouble and expense, so that midwives generally attended the women. On this night one of the neighbor children remembered having been awakened by her mother's voice calling for someone to go for the doctor quick. But, said he, "I guess they let her lay too long," and Dennis echoed the same thought when he said, "I reckon like pore Nancy she didn't have no keer." And thus the brief candle of life of the gray-eyed Sally, which had burned with a steady light and flamed into a warmth of happiness, had suddenly flickered out with a gust from an icy wind.

They placed her in the benign care of Old Pigeon, with her baby in her arms, and two brown standstone slabs picked up from the countryside at her head and her feet, frail boundaries of her last earthly tenancy. Aaron followed her three years later having never paid any attention to

any other woman (according to the Grigsbys) his small tombstone bearing the terse inscription, Aamon Grigsby-Born-1801. Died 1831. I looked all around it for the name of Sarah, his wife, but it was not there. For nearly 100 years she slept in her nameless grave among the weeds and rank grasses and nature's wild flowers. And then her state to which she had come in its infant year, awakened to the historical significance of her grave and in 1916 removed the small slab and erected at the head of Abraham Lincoln's sister a large white monument. Standing like a sermon in stone it seems to say: "And the humble shall be exalted." On it beneath a stone nose-gay we read in large letters, Sarah Lincoln-Wife of Aaron Grigsby-Feb. 10, 1807-Jan. 20, 1828.

There they lie side by side, each with their separate headstones, a little family with a brief love story.



GRAVE OF LINCOLN'S SISTER.

From a photograph taken for McClure's Magazine. Sarah, or Nancy, Lincoln was born in Elizabethtown, Kentucky, in 1807. In 1826 she married Aaron Grigsby, and a year later died. She was buried not far from Gentryville, in what is now called "Old Pigeon Cemetery." Her grave is marked by the rude stone directly over the star. The marble monument in the centre is that of her husband.

LINCOLN SITES IN INDIANA

Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, Lincoln City

Located two miles east of Gentryville, Indiana, on Route 162 in Spencer County, the memorial visitor center has a museum, two memorial halls, and a bookshop with a good selection of publications related to Lincoln and the National Parks. The building exterior features five large sculpted limestone panels by Indiana artist E. H. Daniels depicting important events in Lincoln's life. Hallway galleries offer permanent and changing exhibits on period clothing, pioneer crafts, tools, and the town of Lincoln City.

The Nancy Hanks Lincoln Hall, in one wing of the memorial, holds a tiny U.S. post office which keeps the Lincoln City, Indiana, postmark alive. Another wing, called Abraham Lincoln Hall, houses a beautiful limestone-walled chapel.

Nancy Hanks Lincoln's grave lies on a knoll rising above a parklike mall, an easy, 250-yard walk from the visitor center. The Lincoln cabin site memorial and Living History Farm are a quarter-mile north of the cemetery and can be reached by auto from the visitor center, by a direct foot trail from the cemetery, or by the half-mile Trail of Twelve Stones. Both trails cross the Lincoln Trace, the route the Lincolns followed to their Little Pigeon Creek homestead from the Ohio.

While not original to the site, the homestead farm cabin is from the nineteenth century, moved here from a nearby location and reconstructed from parts of several period cabins. It stands on, or very near, the location of the original Lincoln home.

Close by is a curious and strangely moving Lincoln memorial—replicas of the sill logs and hearthstones from an old, old cabin, unearthed in 1934 when the Nancy Hanks Lincoln

buried. Portions of the church are original. The park is open year-round. Additional information: Lincoln State Park, P.O. Box 216, Lincoln City, IN 47552 (812-937-4710).

"Young Abe Lincoln," a musical drama on Lincoln's life, is presented in a roofed outdoor amphitheater nightly (except Monday) at 8:15 p.m., late June through late August. Additional information: Young Abe Lincoln, P.O. Box 7-21, Lincoln City, IN 47552 (812-937-4493).



The Lincoln Museum, Fort Wayne

Formerly the Louis A. Warren Lincoln Library and Museum, the library is the largest private collection of organized information on Abraham Lincoln. The museum has sixty exhibits arranged in chronological order to tell the story of Lincoln's life. Exhibits include Lincoln manuscripts and docu-

ments, the flag that draped Lincoln's box at Ford's Theatre, one of the President's shawls, and several pieces of china from the Lincoln White House.

Three period rooms—the Indiana log cabin, the Springfield law office, and the War Department telegraph room—offer the flavor of life of the mid-nineteenth century.

Lincoln State Park

Adjacent to the Lincoln Boyhood National Memorial, the 1,747-acre park holds the Little Pigeon Creek Baptist Church and the cemetery where Abraham Lincoln's sister, Sarah, is

buried. Portions of the church are original. The park is open year-round. Additional information: Lincoln State Park, P.O. Box 216, Lincoln City, IN 47552 (812-937-4710).

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Additional information: The Lincoln Museum, 1300 S. Clinton Street, Fort Wayne, IN 46801 (219-455-3864).

Don Davenport

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